

ANSIBLE LINK



DAVID LANGFORD

I hereby cease my mocking of spinoffs from creations like Terry Pratchett's Discworld, with its endless trail of maps, stage and cassette and graphic-novel adaptations, t-shirts, ceramic figures, computer games, concordances, etc ... since I've just been correcting the proofs of my "own" *The Unseen University Challenge: A Discworld Quizbook* (Gollancz, real soon now). And – as Kingsley Amis remarked when leaping aboard the James Bond bandwagon – jolly good luck to me.

PLANET OF THE VOLES

Arthur C. Clarke's latest has a gracious Foreword explaining that readers should be told exactly what they're buying here: a novel wholly written by the late Mike McQuay, based on a 2pp Clarke movie outline (also included). This foreword made little impression on whoever designed Gollancz's jacket for *Richter 10* by ARTHUR C. CLARKE and Mike McQuay...

Neil Gaiman returned to England for the shooting of his tv series *Neverwhere*, and was interested to find the script full of things he didn't quite recall writing, like "SCENE 19 – Deleted." He began to think of his script-revising rôle as being that of a plastic surgeon called in after the axe-wielding thugs called Time and Budget Limitations had done their worst...

David Garnett unearthed a terrible truth in Michael Legat's *An Author's Guide to Getting Published*, which has a whole section listing the kind of books which aspirants should avoid writing since they can't be published commercially: "poetry or science fiction or treatises on unpronounceable compounds or a manual of Pig Sticking, or even an account of your package holiday..." Know your place.

Walter M. Miller (1922-1996) died in mid-January; reportedly he shot himself while depressed over illness and the fairly recent death of his wife. For a long time he had written nothing, but some years ago contracted with Bantam to produce a sequel to his classic *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1960); several hundred pages were supposedly written, but Miller had been looking for a co-author to complete it. Despite long silence he is warmly remembered for *Canticle* and a handful of short stories including the Hugo-winning "The Darfsteller" (1955).

Charles Platt returned all starry-eyed from a visit to his Japanese publishers, Hayakawa, whose eagerness for sf he found untouched by the corroding cynicism of New York editors "who know all too well the disastrous commercial consequences if they publish intelligent novels that they actually like to read." He was also stunned that the editors bought him a ten-course feast out of their own pockets rather than on expenses ("Imagine the staff of HarperCollins doing that!"), and touched that their house magazine reprinted a Platt article on cryonics with "cute little cartoons showing my severed head being gripped by metal tongs and dunked in liquid nitrogen. The likeness was quite accurate..."

Christopher Priest was boggled and delighted to find he had indeed won the £3,000 James Tait Black Memorial prize for his nifty novel *The Prestige*. The presentation took place in Edinburgh late in January.

Robert Rankin, nameless spies informant, has heard about the British SF Association Awards and dropped a subtle hint: "As a British writer of Science Fiction for the last 16 years, who do you have to shag at your place to get an award? Yours hopefully..."

Kaye Webb, fondly remembered by a generation for her editorship of the Penguin children's imprint Puffin (1961-79) and *Puffin Post* magazine (1967-89), died on 16 January aged 81.

INFINITELY IMPROBABLE

1995 *Guardian* UK Top Sellers. No sf at all, except for media tie-ins.... Labouring in the titanic shadow of John Grisham at #1 are: Stephen King, *Insomnia* #9; James Herbert, *The Ghosts of Sleath* #22; Terry Pratchett, *Soul Music* #24 and *Interesting Times* #25; Anne Rice, *Interview with the Vampire* #32 and *Taltos* #68; Charles L. Grant, *X-Files: Goblins* #40 and *X-Files: Whirlwind* #44; Doug Naylor, *The Last Human* #45; David Eddings, *The Hidden City* #62; Clive Barker, *Everville* #94.

Awards! Awards! The Arthur C. Clarke Award shortlist, for best sf novel published in Britain during 1995, comprises: Patricia Anthony, *Happy Policeman*; Stephen Baxter,

The Time Ships; Ken MacLeod, *The Star Fraction*; Paul McAuley, *Fairyland*; Christopher Priest, *The Prestige*; Neal Stephenson, *The Diamond Age*. The Philip K. Dick Award for best original US paperback shortlists the following: Shale Aaron, *Virtual Death*; Bruce Bethke, *Headcrash*; Greg Egan, *Permutation City*; Richard Paul Russo, *Carlucci's Edge*; Amy Thomson, *The Colour of Distance*; Elisabeth Vonarburg, *Reluctant Voyagers*.

Publishers & Sinners. John Brunner's obituaries aroused some new UK reader interest, especially in *Stand on Zanzibar*; Arrow Books say they will "consider" a reprint provided they receive 3,000 or more firm orders placed through bookshops.

No Smoke Without Smoke. The makers of *Gerry Anderson's Space Precinct* have freely used the word "outrageous" of rumours that they are planning to sack the series' producer, Gerry Anderson.

Maison d'Ailleurs: I was flooded with paper and e-mail petition forms concerning this unique sf museum, the "House of Elsewhere" in Yverdon-les-Bains, Switzerland, whose funding faced a 70% cut by the local town council. The petition deadline is already past... but donations would surely be welcomed by the museum's "Amis" group (resembling the UK "Friends of Foundation"): AMDA, case postale 3181, CH-1401 Yverdon-les-Bains.

Crushed Again. *Personal Computer World* magazine reviewed the CD-ROM *SF Encyclopaedia* and reckoned that the main flaw in its update of those 1.3 million award-winning words was the presence of... Too Much Text. "Text, text, and more text." *Voice of Emperor Joseph II*: "Too many notes, Herr Clute."

Oops. David Gemmell wishes to rebut the opinion (quoted in my *Interzone* 104 column) that one of his Alexander the Great books was better in its original MS than after the input of a Legend editor who allegedly wanted more fantasy content: "I have been extremely lucky with all my editors, and not once has undue pressure been brought to bear on me." Indeed, he points out, when he planned a fantasy Western, Random/Legend felt that the entire Western market was dead and gone, but still told him to "go for it" ... hence his successful *Wolf in Shadow*.

Thog's Masterclass. "He glanced fleetingly down, with a prick of lust, at her shapely legs." (Peter James, *Alchemist*) "Ruben's left eyebrow twitched upwards, forcing a grunt past the plug of mince and potato that sounded vaguely impressed." (Alex Stewart, "Yesterday," in *Beyond*; may be partially deciphered by the understanding that the character is eating shepherd's pie.)

"The Day of Forever" (April 1966) "The Day of Forever" is another favourite story of mine, for reasons I have never understood. Perhaps the young man running around those abandoned hotels reminds me of my own adolescence, and that strange interregnum in Shanghai in 1942, and again in 1945, when one side in World War II had moved out and the other had yet to move in. As a child among the Japanese military one had an extraordinary immunity, we moved like pilot fish in front of them as they wandered through empty apartment blocks and disused sea-plane bases, peered into drained swimming pools with that deep melancholy all Japanese seem to have. This was my first story to be published by the second great editor of *New Worlds*, Michael Moorcock, and the start of a completely new chapter...

– From *The Best of J. G. Ballard* (1977)

"Tomorrow is a Million Years" (October 1966)

Zones of transition have always fascinated me. Probably this is due to my childhood in the Far East, during World War II. War, invasion and occupation carried with them cataclysmic transformations of landscape and psyche. Like all high-water marks of experience, intermediary zones, armistices and interregnums seemed to be endowed with a peculiar power – a flight of steps descending into a

river, the refraction of a semi-submerged aircraft fuselage, the interval which separates night from day. I would like to live forever inside such zones, and perhaps I do so without realizing it. These are the landscapes which dream and nostalgia construct forever in our minds.

– From *Le livre d'or de la science-fiction: J. G. Ballard* (1980; back-translated from Robert Louit's French by DP)

"The Recognition" (*Autumn 1967*)

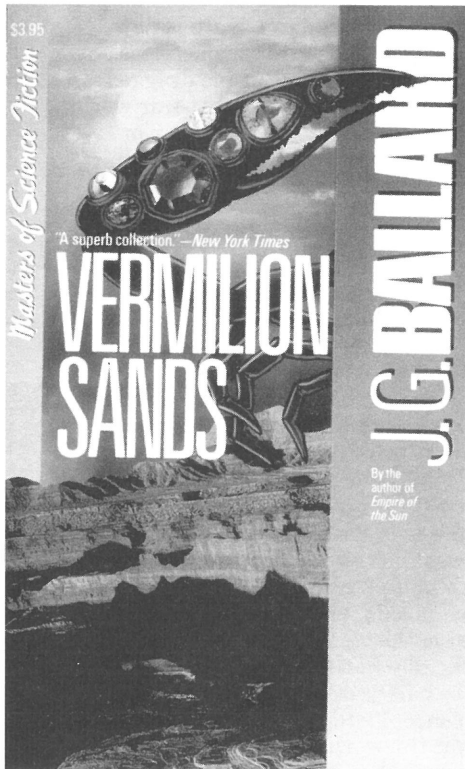
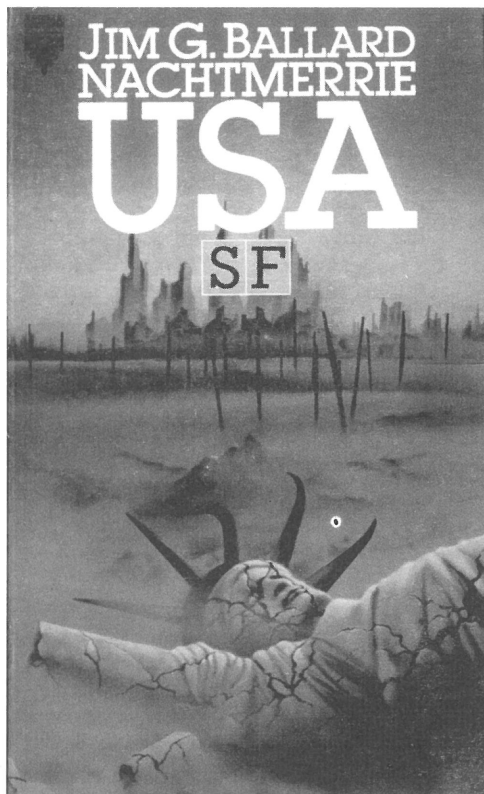
"The Recognition" expresses a cordial distaste for the human race – not inappropriately. The temper of the times seems to be one of self-love, if of a strange sort – Caliban asleep across a mirror stained with vomit. But perhaps the story also illustrates the paradox that the only real freedom is to be found in a prison. Sometimes it is difficult to tell on which side of the bars we really are – the real gaps between the bars are the sutures of one's own skull. Originally I toyed with the notion of the narrator entering a cage and joining the circus, but this would have destroyed an important point. The story is not in fact a piece of hard-won misanthropy but a comment on some of the more unusual perspectives that separate us. The most important characters, whose motives are a key to the story, are the young woman and her dwarf. Why do they take this dismal circus on its endless tour?

– "Afterword to 'The Recognition'" (*Dangerous Visions* ed. Harlan Ellison, Doubleday, 1967)

"Love and Napalm: Export USA" (*July 1968*)

At the end of the 1960s, when I wrote *The Atrocity Exhibition*, I was moved to measure the increasing – and above all sinister – part that science played in the creation of those enormous fictions which, more and more, governed our lives. We were all living inside an enormous nightmare novel. Scientists no longer took their subject matter from nature, but from their own fantasies, or from their fictionalization of nature. During the 60s the imaginary experiments I described, and the conclusions at which I arrived, became common currency in scientific journals.

– From *Le livre d'or de la science-fiction: J. G. Ballard* (1980; back-translated from Robert Louit's French by DP)



Vermilion Sands (April 1971)

The short stories that make up this collection were written between 1956 and 1970, and once they were published in a single volume I never returned, regrettably, to this genial playground. By sealing one's imagination between hard covers one can close the door forever on a still vivid private world. I'm glad that I began my career by writing short stories, when I was free to chase any passing hare in a way that is no longer possible, and without over-committing myself to a single idea. Fiction today is dominated by career novelists locked into their publishers' contracts like the prematurely middle-aged encumbered by mortgages and pension plans. Irresponsibility, especially the agreeable variety displayed in *Vermilion Sands*, has a great many neglected virtues.

One of the stories in the collection, "Prima Belladonna," was the first piece of fiction that I ever published, and I can still remember the thrill of receiving the cheque for £8. At last I was a professional writer, and my wife and I celebrated by using the money to buy our baby son a new pram. Pushing it past the department stores in Chiswick High Street, a hundred ideas in my head, I felt that I had found the philosopher's stone.

Looking back, it seems curious that my first short story was set in an imaginary beach resort as far removed from the grey, shabby Britain of the 1950s as one could go without actually leaving the planet. By 1956 I had spent ten years in England, but clearly had yet to put down any real roots. The notion of a future